

Farewell from the Editor-In-Chief

After 18 enjoyable years

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Dear Readers, Authors, Reviewers, and Friends,

In March 1991, I had the honor and opportunity to join Saudi Medical Journal. Initially, I was responsible for the day-to-day management of the journal, and the Neuroscience related material. However, I quickly gained more experience, and in 1994 I took on the full role and responsibilities of Editor. There have been so many major changes to the journal since that time, but really, it doesn't seem that long ago. July 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the journal's inception, and on this occasion, it is with a mixture of sadness and joy that I now announce my retirement from this privileged position.

I have had so much help, guidance, and support over the years; it is truly difficult to know where to start expressing my appreciation and thanks. First and foremost to HRH Prince Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz, the journal's Patron, who has blessed and supported the journal from the very beginning. To Major General Dr. Abdul Hamid Al-Faraidi, the Founding Editor, to General Ketab Al-Otaibi, the Editorial Director, and MSD Director, and to the Administration of the Riyadh Military Hospital. Their support and confidence in the journal have been unwavering and constant.

To the authors, without whom the journal would cease to exist, I admire their continued struggle to publish in an ever-increasing competitive field, when the pressure to "publish or perish" has never been more strongly felt. This is followed quickly by the excellent reviewers who have selflessly dedicated their time and energy to improving the quality of published research. Of course, to all the past and present members of the editorial team, comprising past editors, associate editors, advisory and editorial board members.

To the dedicated editorial staff who are the very heart of the journal, and without whose help

I would not have been able to succeed in my role, I offer my most humble and deepest thanks and appreciation from myself, and on behalf of the Journal and the Kingdom. And, in fact, everyone, who has ever taken a moment to pause, open the cover, and leaf through the journal's pages, I hope that we have managed to include something that has appealed and added to the wealth of medical literature that exists.

I would also like to give a special thanks to my dear friends George Bruyn and Robert Daroff for all their invaluable guidance and support over the years. Although George Bruyn is no longer with us, he is not forgotten, and still much appreciated.

Although I am leaving, I will be watching the journal's progress with continued interest and pride. I am comforted in the knowledge that it will continue to excel, and surpass its reputation as the leading medical journal in the Middle East. My door (and mobile!) will always be open to lend a listening ear, and to share the wealth of knowledge and experience that I have gained over the years. As my successor, it is my privilege to introduce Brig. Gen. Saud Al-Omani, Director of Surgery, and Chairman of Medical Staff, Riyadh Military Hospital, as the new Editor-In-Chief of Saudi Medical Journal. While change in leadership can be difficult, I am confident that Dr. Al-Omani, with the assistance and expertise of Dr. Fahdah Alokaily, the journal's hardworking and dedicated Associate Editor, will guide the editorial team safely through this, and the transition will be a smooth one.

When I arrived at the journal, we were publishing on average 15 manuscripts per issue, 6 issues per year, and now we average 35 manuscripts per



issue, 12 issues a year. The journal was originally published in London, however, one of my first achievements was to move the publishing to Saudi Arabia, and to bring the journal style, format, and size in line with international standards.

In addition to the regular issues, we also published a number of supplements. In 1999 the journal became a monthly publication, and we also published a Special Supplement with a compilation of Landmark articles published in SMJ on the theme of the Centennial Celebration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Also, in 1999 the journal committed itself to protect all the literature published by medical journals in the Kingdom. This was carried out in 2 stages: all abstract material was collected and reproduced on a CD from all the Saudi Journals from 1979-1995. This was then updated in its second edition in 2001, and includes all literature published from 1979 to 1999.



The year 2000 was a historic moment for the journal, when the culmination of all the hard work by the Editors, Advisory and Editorial Board, the Editorial staff, and reviewers resulted in receiving approval for indexing by the National Library of Medicine (NLM), and included in PubMed and Medline, with a resulting and significant improvement in the journal's impact factor.

This was an important step for the journal as it is now part of the international literature, available worldwide. This was achieved after thorough and prolonged improvement in the regular circulation of the journal, speeding up of manuscript acceptance and publication, improving the style of presentation and number of pages published as well as increasing the circulation of the journal from bi-monthly to monthly. We are also currently indexed by Excerpta Medica in EMBASE and Thomson Scientific (formerly known as Thomson ISI). In the same year, we also established the journal's website (www.smj.org.sa), which now has an average of 6000 hits daily, and where readers can access the full text of all articles



published since the year 2000 in HTML and PDF format. In addition to articles, readers can also access the Table of Contents of upcoming issues, there is an advanced search engine, and a wealth of other information to help the author submit his article to the journal.

In 2002 we published a Special Supplement in Arabic addressed to not only physicians but also to the public entitled 'Health & Life', making it the third Arabic supplement published by the journal. This issue dealt with many topics important to our society addressed by prominent clinicians and scientists giving real facts on topics to educate the public by evidence based rather than tabloid medicine.

Also in 2002, we established a Quality Control Section and a member of staff was appointed to be the Quality Control Officer (QCO) and act as an Ombudsman for the Journal. The Ombudsman's role is to: 1. Act as a spokesperson for authors and liaison between the authors and the editors. This role will be to deal with all grievances referred from manuscript authors, editors, and members of editorial staff. 2. To supervise the speed and proficiency of manuscript processing. 3. To supervise the quality of, and investigate any mistakes in, the printed journal. 4. To deal with all complaints from the readers of the journal regarding irregularities concerning any of the articles published. The introduction of the QC prompted the implementation of several new policy changes, which will continue to improve the excellence of the journal.

We also introduced the journal's "Highlights" section in 2002, which provides a brief summary of articles included in each issue. We published 2 supplements in 2003; the first a Special Supplement on Hepatitis C Virus in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, and the second a Special Supplement on Pediatric Surgery.

Also, in 2003 Saudi Medical Journal co-organized the 1st Regional Conference on Medical Journals in the WHO, Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) held in Egypt, and in 2004 on the occasion of the journal's 25th anniversary, we hosted the 2nd Regional Conference on Medical Journals in the WHO, EMR and published a special supplement on Medical Journalism, in addition to a special Arabic supplement of landmark Abstracts from the previous 25 years.

Due to the steady increase in the number of articles published each year, in 2003 the journal's yearly volume split into 2 sub-volumes, with 2 binders for each annual volume.

Due to my increasing responsibilities at MSD, in 2005 Dr. Fahdah Al-Okaily was appointed as Associate Editor to the journal, and quickly took on the management of the day-to-day running of the journal.

In 2006, in collaboration with the Prince Salman Center for Research and Disability, we published a special supplement on Pediatric Stroke.

In March 2007, on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the Advisory and Editorial Board of the Journal and in association with the Bahrain Branch of the Cochrane Collaboration we hosted a 1-day workshop on “The Cochrane Library the best single course of evidence on the effects of healthcare.” Topics covered included: introduction to the Cochrane Collaboration, and Library, Narrative and Systemic Reviews, Identifying Randomized Control Trials and Quality-Assessing Randomized Control Trials.

In 2008, we undertook the design and implementation of a specialized web-based tracking system to help modernize the submission, peer review, and tracking of manuscripts submitted to the journal. The journal receives a large number of manuscripts per year, all of which are processed in a professional and efficient manner. This program will be of great benefit to the authors, reviewers, and editorial staff and will ensure faster and more reliable manuscript processing.

Increasingly, over the last few years, the journal has had to deal with the burden of ethics misconduct. Unfortunately, we have been faced with incidences of fraud, repetition (divided publication), duplicate publication, and plagiarism. This has now resulted in the journal adopting stringent screening of each and

every paper published for plagiarism and duplicate publication, and implementation of policies for handling these ethical issues in accordance with internationally accepted standards. We also now insist upon submission of a manuscript that the authors declare if any part of the material exists elsewhere in a published form, or if similar material is under consideration by another journal.

To summarize, the journal has more than doubled in circulation, number of articles received (1,575 in 2008), and number of pages published. The turnover time from received to acceptance has reduced from 5 months in 1998 to 3 months in 2008, while the time from acceptance to publication has reduced from 10 months in 1998 to 1.5 months in 2008. In addition to the regular issues we regularly publish supplements on important topics in Arabic and English, we also publish Annual Reports, and have established our own website and achieved indexing status by the National Library of Medicine.



Success is not measured by what one brings, but rather by what one leaves behind. My objective when I joined was for the journal to not only be a media for publishing articles, but also a means of education and academic leadership, promoting original and significant research useful for our society and humankind. I hope that this legacy will continue for many years to come. The goodwill and prosperity that I now wish the journal, and my successor, is immeasurable.

Brigadier General Saud F. Al-Omani, MB ChB, FRCS (Ed), DIMC RCS (Ed).

- ◆ (2009 – up to date) Chairman of Medical Staff at Riyadh Military Hospital
- ◆ (2007 – up to date) Director of Surgery Department at Riyadh Military Hospital
- ◆ (2006 – 2007) Director of Medical Studies Department at Riyadh Military Hospital
- ◆ (1999 - 2002) Associate Clinical Professor in Surgery, School of Medicine, King Saud University
- ◆ (2000 - up to date) Examiner for the Royal College of Surgeons

